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NEGATIVE
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JOE PRUETT
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MARK VERHEIDEN
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PAGES

NEGATIVE BURN

A Mad Hatter Studios International Product • Joe Pruett ~ Editor

VOLUME ONE • NUMBER TWENTY-EIGHT

DUSTY STAR ..... Page 1
written by Joe Pruett
illustrated by Andrew Robinson

MR. MAMOULIAN ..... Page 10
written and illustrated by
Brian Bolland

ALAN MOORE'S SONGBOOK ..... Page 11
written by Alan Moore
illustrated by James A. Owen

FAVORITE SONG ..... Page 17
written by Mark Verheiden
illustrated by Ken Meyer Jr.

THE MORTONS ..... Page 28
written by Martin Conaghan
illustrated by Mike Perkins

SKETCHBOOK..... Page 34
illustrated by Ray Lago

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JUJU EYES ..... Page 38
written by Hart Fisher
illustrated by John Cassaday
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ANDEX, GIRL WARHOLA ..... Page 46
written by David Moyes
illustrated by Chris McLoughlin

PEDESTRIAN..... Page 54
written by Paul Erickson
illustrated by Paul Fricke

DEADWORLD CHRONICLES..... Page 55
written by Jim Frier
illustrated by Tim Holtrop

LIONEL'S LAMENT..... Page 60
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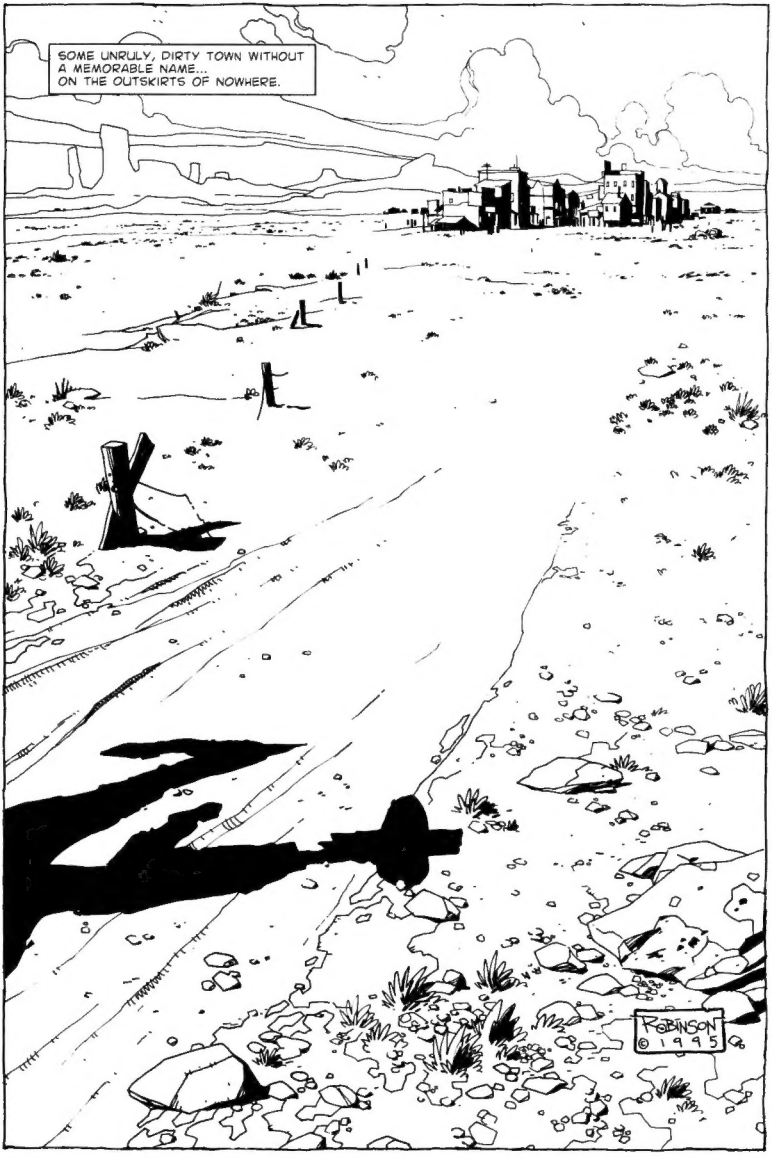
SOME UNRULY, DIRTY TOWN WITHOUT A MEMORABLE NAME... ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF NOWHERE.
ROBINSON
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BEER
BEER
LADY, ANYONE EVER TELL YOU THAT YOU HAVE ONE *UGLY* HORSE?
MY HORSE IS *WHAT?*
I SAID YOUR HORSE IS UGLY.
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT YOU SAID.

NOBODY! I MEAN NOBODY DOES THAT TO ROSCOE THE ORPHAN MAKER AND GETS AWAY WITH IT.
SAY YOUR PRAYERS, HONEY.
'CAUSE I'M...
YOU WERE SAYING?
DUSTY
STAR
WORDS
JOE PRUETT
GRAWINS
ANDREW ROBINSON
LETTERS
ROXANNE STARR
A PRUETT-ROBINSON PRODUCTION

HEH. HEH. I WAS...I WAS JUST APOLOGIZING ABOUT MY EYESIGHT, MA'AM.
I WAS MISTAKEN. IT'S ACTUALLY QUITE A LOVELY ANIMAL.
APOLOGY ACCEPTED.
WHAT'S THAT STENCH?

OH.
I REALLY NEED TO GET SOME DEODORANT.

NOW THERE'S SOMETHING THAT'S LONG OVERDUE ...A ROOM AND A BATH.
I'M GOIN' PARK YOU RIGHT HERE FOR A BIT, SASSY, AND SEE ABOUT GETTIN' A ROOM FOR THE NIGHT.

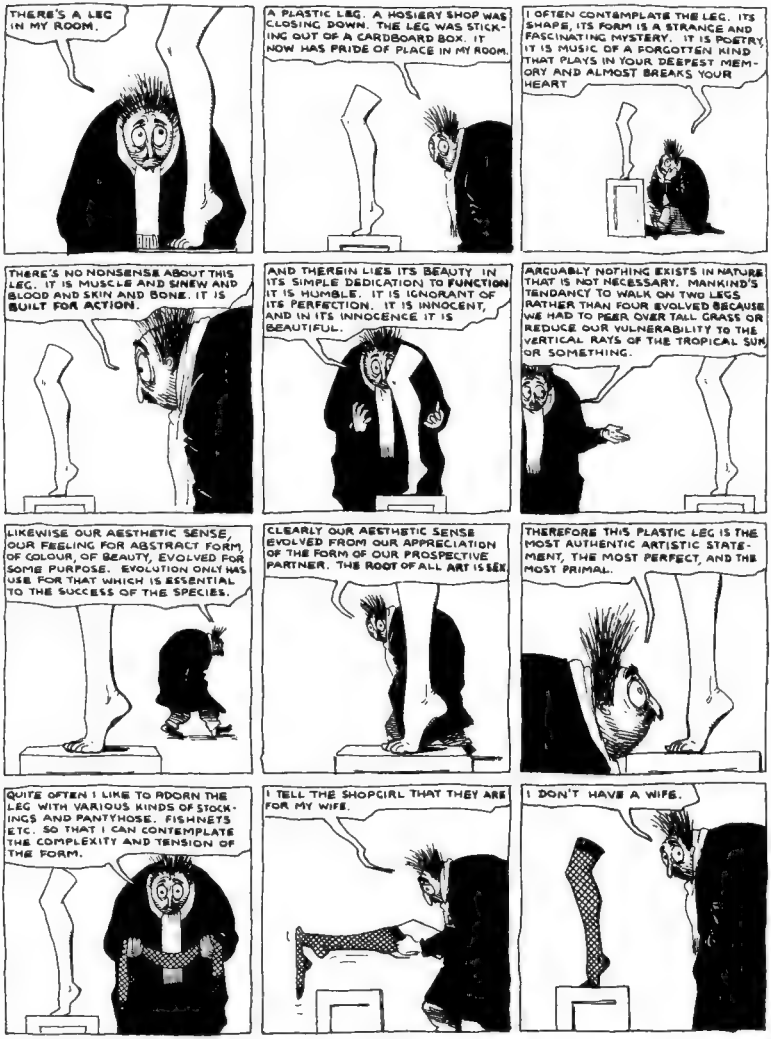
MMM. NOW THIS IS LIVING.
creak
NOW WHAT DID I DO WITH MY GUNS?
OH YEAH.
WELL, I NEED SOMETHING, BUT WHAT...?

OKAY, DON'T TRY ANYTHING STUPID!
CRACK
AHHH!
YOU ROBOTS ALWAYS STINK.
SPLAAAASSH!
FIZZZZ
FIZZZ
POP
POP

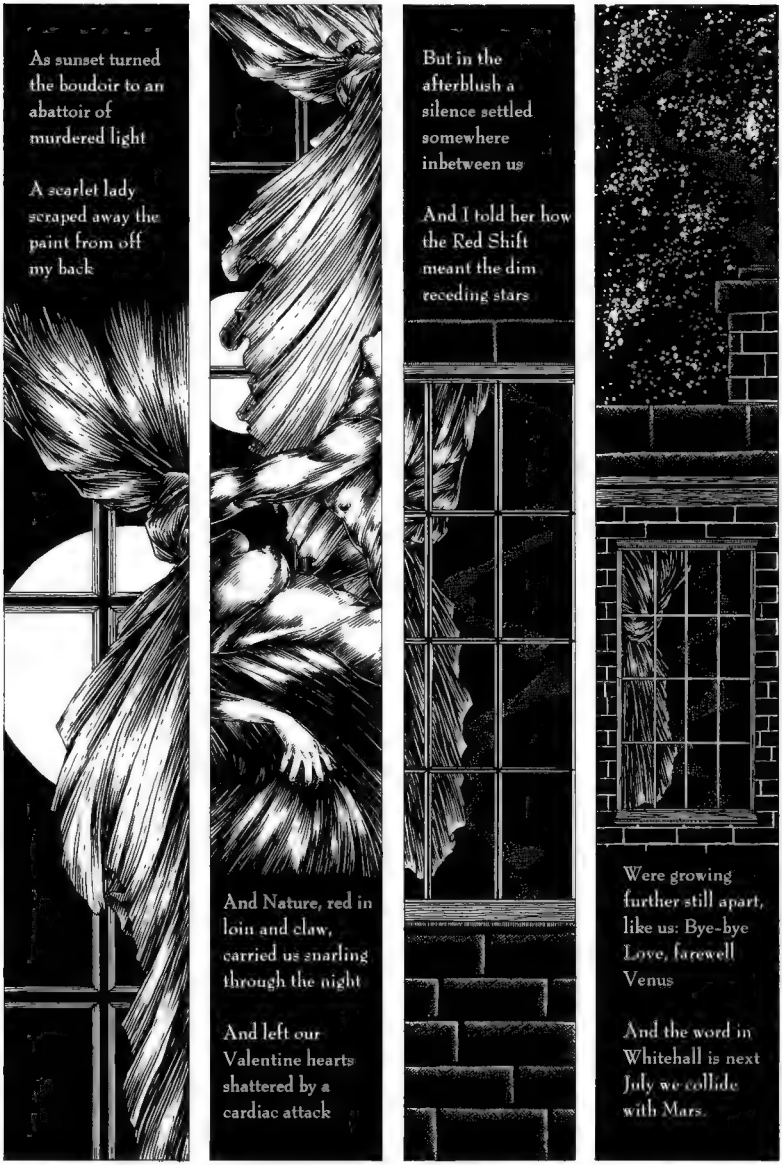
WELL, THERE GOES THE ONLY DECENT BATH I'VE HAD IN A COUPLE OF WEEKS.
MY NOSE. MY NOSE.
SHE BROKE MY NOSE...WITH A SOAP-ON-A-ROPE.
WHO SENT YOU?
BRADSTREET... GO TO THE TOWN OF BRADSTREET. YOU'LL FIND YOUR ANSWERS THERE.
BRADSTREET, HMM.
CAN I GO NOW?

KNOCK KNOCK
COME IN!
YOU RANG FOR A BELLMAN, MA'AM?
YEAH, I DID. I'M CHECKING OUT AND I NEED SOMEONE TO TAKE CARE OF A MESS I LEFT IN THE BATHROOM.
CERTAINLY, MA'AM...
I THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME I PAID A VISIT TO THE TOWN OF BRADSTREET.
BUT, MA'AM ...WHAT DO YOU EXPECT ME TO DO TO?...
WHATEVER YOU THINK'S NECESSARY. BYE.
OH POO.

MR. MAMOULIAN
A LEG


THERE'S A LEG IN MY ROOM.
A PLASTIC LEG. A HOSIERY SHOP WAS CLOSING DOWN. THE LEG WAS STICKING OUT OF A CARDBOARD BOX. IT NOW HAS PRIDE OF PLACE IN MY ROOM.
I OFTEN CONTEMPLATE THE LEG. ITS SHAPE, ITS FORM IS A STRANGE AND FASCINATING MYSTERY. IT IS POETRY. IT IS MUSIC OF A FORGOTTEN KIND THAT PLAYS IN YOUR DEEPEST MEMORY AND ALMOST BREAKS YOUR HEART
THERE'S NO NONSENSE ABOUT THIS LEG. IT IS MUSCLE AND SINEW AND BLOOD AND SKIN AND BONE. IT IS BUILT FOR ACTION.
AND THERSIN LIES ITS BEAUTY IN ITS SIMPLE DEDICATION TO FUNCTION IT IS HUMBLE. IT IS IGNORANT OF ITS PERFECTION. IT IS INNOCENT, AND IN ITS INNOCENCE IT IS BEAUTIFUL.
ARGUABLY NOTHING EXISTS IN NATURE THAT IS NOT NECESSARY. MANKIND'S TENDANCY TO WALK ON TWO LEGS RATHER THAN FOUR EVOLVED BECAUSE WE HAD TO PEER OVER TALL GRASS OR REDUCE OUR VULNERABILITY TO THE VERTICAL RAYS OF THE TROPICAL SUN, OR SOMETHING.
LIKEWISE OUR AESTHETIC SENSE, OUR FEELING FOR ABSTRACT FORM, OF COLOUR, OF BEAUTY, EVOLVED FOR SOME PURPOSE. EVOLUTION ONLY HAS USE FOR THAT WHICH IS ESSENTIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE SPECIES.
CLEARLY OUR AESTHETIC SENSE EVOLVED FROM OUR APPRECIATION OF THE FORM OF OUR PROSPECTIVE PARTNER. THE ROOT OF ALL ART IS SEX.
THEREFORE THIS PLASTIC LEG IS THE MOST AUTHENTIC ARTISTIC STATEMENT, THE MOST PERFECT, AND THE MOST PRIMAL.
QUITE OFTEN I LIKE TO ADORN THE LEG WITH VARIOUS KINDS OF STOCKINGS AND PANTYHOSE. FISHNETS ETC. SO THAT I CAN CONTEMPLATE THE COMPLEXITY AND TENSION OF THE FORM.
I TELL THE SHOPGIRL THAT THEY ARE FOR MY WIFE.
I DON'T HAVE A WIFE.

Alan Moore's Songbook
ROSE
MADDER


As sunset turned the boudoir to an abattoir of murdered light
A scarlet lady scraped away the paint from off my back
And Nature, red in loin and claw, carried us snarling through the night
And left our Valentine hearts shattered by a cardiac attack
But in the afterblush a silence settled somewhere inbetween us
And I told her how the Red Shift meant the dim receding stars
Were growing further still apart, like us: Bye-bye Love, farewell Venus
And the word in Whitehall is next July we collide with Mars.

She wore rouge
and red shoes

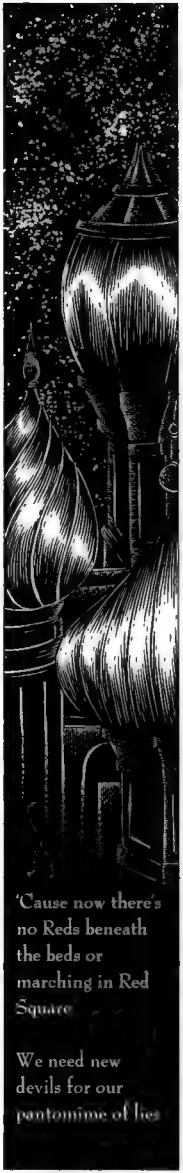
They'd get red-
eyed with booze

Brag of red-letter
days when they'd
had her

She rose lurid and
mad

In the dreams of
each lad

But the red badge
of courage rose
madder.



'Cause now there's
no Reds beneath
the beds or
marching in Red
Square

We need new
devils for our
pantomime of lies

What can we use,
now they no longer
keep the Red Flag
flying there

To wave like red
rag at a bull: to
bring a red mist to
its eyes?

So near the Red
Sea's center
parting we will
build a funeral
pyre

Oil-fueled, lit
cherry like the
dreams of Red
Adair

Where men's heads burst and turn to ketchup in the crimson tracer-fire

And for me, some scarlet ribbons; scarlet ribbons for my hair.

She wore rouge and red shoes

They'd get red-eyed with booze

Brag of red-letter days when they'd had her

She rose lurid and mad

In the dreams of each lad

But the red badge of courage rose madder.

So now they've sent the call-up papers and they've sent the red reminders

There's a red light district waiting in a harbour far away

And though you don't want to lose me there's these red tape ties that bind us

And the red sails in the sunset mark red admirals at play.

Now I'll wipe away the lipstick, through the memory still lingers

And reflect, as rockets, ruby-eyed, glare upon vermillion sands

On how the blood that won't flow to our cocks flows to our trigger fingers:

Scatters Poppies in an eastern corner or the Western Lands.

She wore rouge and red shoes

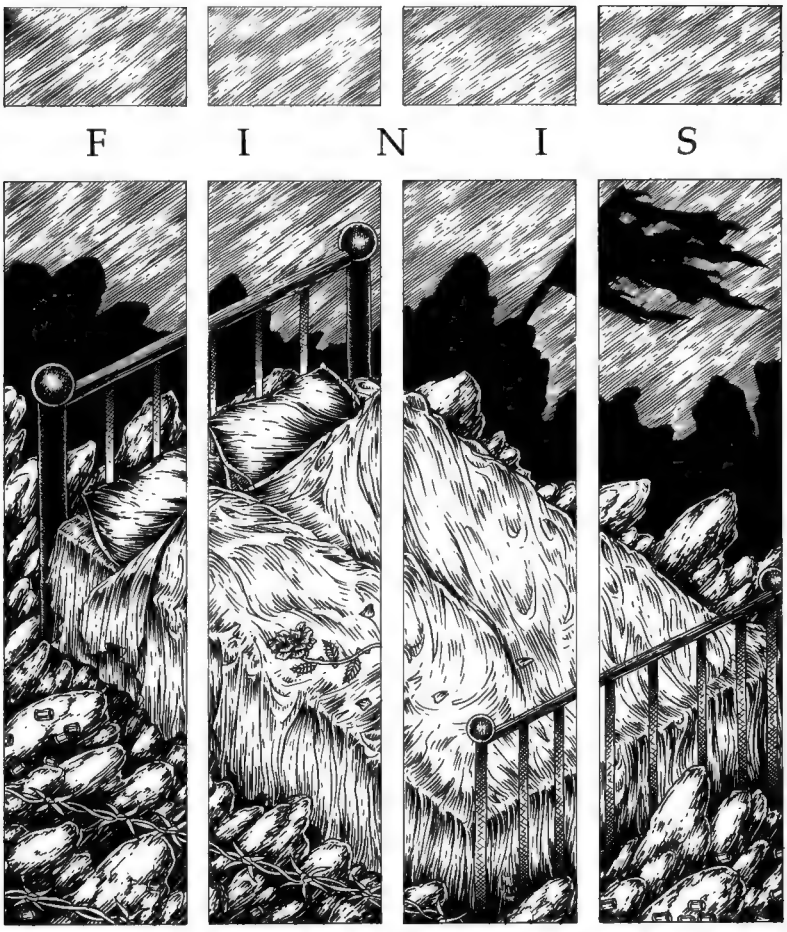
They'd get red-eyed with booze

Brag of red-letter days when they'd had her

She rose lurid and mad

In the dreams of each lad

But the red badge of courage rose madder.



Written By Alan Moore
Illustrated By James A. Owen

BARELY ELEVEN AND IT WAS ALREADY PUSHING 95 DEGREES. SON OF A BITCH WAS HOT. A BAKING HEAT THAT DRIED YOUR LIPS UNTIL THEY SPLIT WITH A SMILE.
THE RADIO WAS SCREAMING A DUANE EDDY SONG SO LOUD THAT THE GUITAR HAD DISTORTED INTO SOMETHING BEYOND MUSIC; MORE BLUR THAN SOUND.
HE CLOSED HIS EYES, SAVORING A MOMENT OF STRATOSPHERIC DARKNESS.
IT WAS BETTER AT NIGHT. IN THE DARK HE COULD FEEL THE BLEAK IMAGINATION OF ALL THOSE EYES ALONG THE ROAD. PRIMAL CAVEMAN FEAR.
Favorite Song
STORY: MARK VERHEIDEN
ART: KEN MEYER JR.
LETTERS: ROXANNE STARR
DAYLIGHT WAS TOO FRIENDLY. TOO OPEN. NO PLACE TO HIDE.
IF THEY DIDN'T HIDE, IT WASN'T ANY FUN.
DAZE
HELP WANTED

HE SPOTTED THE HELP WANTED SIGN ACROSS THREE LANES OF INTERSTATE
HE JABBED THE GAS AND MADE THE EXIT BY INCHES
THAT'S THE FIRST TIME HE SAW HIM.
HEY, MISTER-- TURN IT UP!
IT WAS HOTTER THAN HELL OUT THERE, PUSHING 100, BUT THE DUSTY FOOL WAS IDIOT-GRINNING LIKE SOME CARNIVAL KEWPIE DOLL.
GREEN KILLED THE RADIO. THE MUSIC WAS HIS--HE WASN'T GOING TO SHARE IT WITH SOME PIG-EYED REDNECK
ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE, HE WOULD HAVE PLAYED SOME MUSIC OF HIS OWN FOR THE UGLY SON-OF-A-BITCH.
BUT THAT "HELP WANTED" SIGN KEPT HIM QUIET. IT WAS BIG, DESPERATE AND THAT'S WHAT HE NEEDED.
BAZOOKA
YOU THE MANAGER?
AND OWNER AND COOK AND GODDAMN PLUMBER.
TELL ME YOU'RE INTERESTED IN THE JOB.
THE RESTAURANT WAS ONE OF THOSE RETRO 50'S PIT STOPS. MANAGEMENT PROBABLY HAD GRAND DREAMS THAT IT WOULD BE THE FIRST OF A CHAIN-- THE NEXT HARD ROCK OR PLANET HOLLYWOOD.

BUT THERE WAS NO POT OF GOLD AT THE END OF THIS RAINBOW. JUST ONE MORE PISS-ASS WATERING HOLE FOR THE LOCAL REDNECKS.
JOBS KITCHEN WORK--DISHWASHING, BUSSING TABLES ; DAY MINIMUM WAGE PLUS MEALS AND CASH IS NO PROBLEM
STRAP ON AN APRON AND I CAN HAVE YOU ON THE FLOOR WITHIN MINUTES
Chef Boy R Me!
WHO'D I FEED A COUPLE QUARTERS INTO THE JUKEBOX FIRST?
THE JUKEBOX WAS A CLASSIC SEEBURG, AN EASY SIX GRAND ON THE COLLECTOR'S MARKET. GREEN POPPED A QUARTER IN THE COIN SLOT AND HEARD THE REASSURING SCRATCH OF OLD VINYL
THE 45'S WERE RACKED INSIDE LIKE THIN BLACK TEETH. SONGS WERE MOSTLY COUNTRY, WITH SOME ARENA ROCK TOSSED IN FOR THE SPIKY TEENAGE CROWD
I LIKE TO HEAR MUSIC WHILE I WORK
GREEN DIDN'T BOTHER WITH THE INDEX; HE PUNCHED SONGS AT RANDOM... A-28, D-14, J-9.
THE FIRST BARS OF SOME BULLSHIT "I LOVE YOU" BALLAD WAS PLAYING, BUT THE WORDS DIDN'T MATTER
FOR A FEW GLORIOUS SECONDS, NOTHING DID...
SANG TO HIM
AND HE SANG BACK
THEN, AS QUICKLY AS IT CAME, THE MOMENT PASSED
YOU LIKE MUSIC?
MY DAD LETS ME PLAY WHATEVER I WANT!
YEAH? YOUR OLD MAN SOUNDS LIKE A REAL GEORGIA PEACH

PEDESTRIAN

Poetry Slam by PAUL ERICKSON Adapted for Comics by PAUL FRICKE

ERT!
HEY, BONE-HEAD!
LOOK AT ME WHEN YOU WALK IN FRONT OF MY CAR!
YOU HAVE THE RIGHT OF WAY, BUT YOU AREN'T COLLISION-PROOF! IF I RUN YOU DOWN, NO BODY SHOP WILL FIX YOUR BODY!
WHY DO YOU TRUST ME? ARE YOU CONFIDENT THAT:
I SEE YOU?
MY BRAKES ARE WORKING?
THE PAVEMENT ISN'T SLICK?
I'M NOT DRUNK?
I'M NOT LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO RUN DOWN?
DON'T YOU DARE PUT YOUR LIFE IN MY STRANGER'S HANDS!
MAYBE YOU WANT TO BE RUN DOWN TO SUE MY INSURANCE COMPANY, SWAPPING YOUR MAIMED BODY FOR THE GOOD LIFE!
ARE YOU WORTH SO LITTLE?
MAYBE IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER IF YOU DON'T GET TO WORK OR YOU DON'T GET HOME TO YOUR KIDS OR MAYBE YOU WEREN'T GOING ANYWHERE IN THE FIRST PLACE!
DEAD OR ALIVE, BROKEN OR WHOLE, YOU DON'T CARE ANYMORE! AM I SUPPOSED TO CARE?
I CALL YOU BONE-HEAD AS MY BENEDICTION.
STOP

THE DAYS PASSED SLOWLY. FROM TIME TO TIME ONE OF ROSMAN'S WAITRESSES WOULD TRY TO GET FRIEND-Y--SHAKE HER LITT-E TITS AND SMILE LIKE IT MEANT SOMETHING
GREEN WAS STAGGERED BY THEIR IGNORANCE. APPALLED THEY COULDN'T UNDERSTAND THAT NOTHING WOULD BE RIGHT UNTIL HE FOUND IT..
...THE SONG. HIS FAVORITE SONG.
THE MUSIC PLAYED NON-STOP, BACKGROUND SOP TO BREATHY INNUENDO AND FEEBLE GROPINGS. HE WAS FURIOUS AT THE WAY THEY TOOK THE MUSIC FOR GRANTED.
AT NIGHT, AFTER HIS SHIFT, GREEN WOULD TAKE PART OF HIS PAY IN QUARTERS AND FEED THE JUKEBOX UNTIL CLOSING.
EACH NEW SONG BROUGHT THE HOPE OF DISCOVERY--BUT AFTER A FEW NOTES THAT HOPE WOULD FADE, LIKE A SWEET CANDY DISSOLVING UNDER GREEN'S TONGUE
WHEN SOME FAT-FACED TOWNIE TRIED TO INTERRUPT, HE'D BACK HIM OFF--QUIET AND POLITE, SO ROSMAN WOULDN'T NOTICE, BUT STRONG ENOUGH THAT HE WOULDN'T TRY AGAIN.
IT WAS THERE, HE KNEW IT. WHY WAS IT HIDING?
A.I. Damage MUST WASH THAT THANG OUT!
IT WAS 3:30 ON A THURSDAY-- TEN DAYS AFTER HE HAD STARTED GREEN WAS JUST FINISHING THE LAST OF THE LUNCH DISHES
...WHEN FOUR HARD-ON CHORDS CHURNED FROM THE JUKEBOX SPEAKERS A METAL SONG, ONE HE'D HEARD A THOUSAND TIMES BEFORE...
CHRIST--
.. SUDDENLY REVEALED.

THE SONG SPOKE TO HIM WITH ASSAULTIVE CLARITY. ON THE SURFACE, THE LYRICS WERE SOME TREACLE ABOUT LOVE, A GIRL, THE USUAL
BUT THOSE WERE JUST WORDS, HUMAN WORDS, A RUSE TO KEEP THE MESSAGE FROM THE UNINITIATED
GOD... I CAN HEAR IT!
Eagle forever The night
THE SCALDING WATER SUDDENLY TURNED CLEAR AND COOL
THE SONG REMOVED THE PAIN
THE EMPTINESS OF GREEN'S LIFE DISAPPEARED, AS IF IN 3 MINUTES AND 52 SECONDS HE FOUND SOME SORT OF ANSWER
-AS IF THE ACHE OF THE LAST THIRTY YEARS WAS THE DREAM, AND THE OLD DREAMS WERE SUDDENLY REAL
THE NEW DREAMS WERE WARMING. THE WAITRESS SMILED AND THIS TIME GREEN SMILED BACK
I LIKE YOU, GREEN...WE'LL HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT
MAYBE THIS TIME WOULD BE DIFFERENT

THAT'S WHEN HE HEARD IT.
IT WAS ROSMAN'S KID--THE RETARD--SINGING ALONG TO GREEN'S SONG, EXCEPT HE WASN'T PARROTING THE ACTUAL LYRICS--
GLASS-BITTER--THE EEEEEEEYES
HE WAS SINGING THE SECRETS--GREEN'S GLORIOUS, PRIVATE MYSTERIES--SPEWING THEM SO ALL COULD HEAR
GREEN'S HANDS SUDDENLY BURNED LIKE BLISTERING FIRE.
HE KNOWS
I LIKE YOU, GREEN, WE'LL HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT..
HE STUMBLED INTO HIS CAR AND DROVE WITHOUT PURPOSE, CRISSCROSSING THE TOWN AIMLESSLY, TRYING TO FIND SOLACE IN THE DARKNESS
THE RADIO WAS SCREAMING FULL VOLUME, A BLUR OF GUITAR AND SCREAMS
BUT IT DIDN'T MATTER THE SONG WAS GONE

Honk Honk
THE SON OF A BITCH HAD TAKEN IT FROM HIM
OH, HI, I WAS JUST WALKING HOME
WHERE'D YOU GO ALL OF A SUDDEN MR GREEN? MY DAD'S REALLY MAD.
I WASN'T FEELING WELL. WANT A RIDE?
THEY DROVE THROUGH THE RURAL DARKNESS, LONG STRETCHES OF EMPTY FIELD GLOWING BLUE-BLACK UNDER THE AUGUST MOON
FASCINATED BY THE CAR, DAVE HARDLY NOTICED AS GREEN PULLED OFF DOWN A RUTTED DIRT PATH
THE SHOCKS THUMPED AGAINST THE UNDERCARRIAGE, CREATING AN ODD, MONOTONOUS BEAT. AS IF HEARING SOMETHING IN THE SOUND, DAVE STARTED TO HUM GREEN'S SONG
SUDDENLY HE COULDN'T DRIVE --COULDN'T THINK--COULDN'T BREATHE. THE BOY'S VOICE SLASHED HIM, CRUEL AS A KNIFE
ARE ARE WE LOST? MR. GREEN
GET OUT!
I-I DON'T KNOW WHERE WE ARE, MR GREEN
MY DAD'S GOING TO BE MAD.

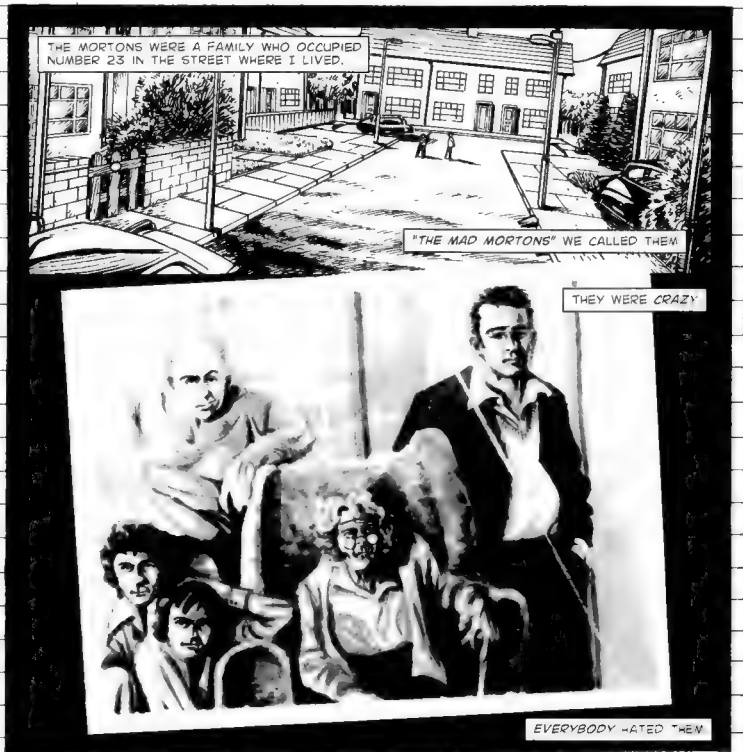
SHUT UP!
YOU HURT ME-- I I DIDN'T EVEN DO ANYTHING!
THE SONG WAS MINE!
YOU STOLE IT FROM ME!
GO AHEAD. SING!
AHHHHHHHH!

THE BOY WRITHED IN THE DIRT, HIS KNEE SHATTERED LIKE DRY KINDLING
FOR A SECOND, GREEN ALMOST FELT SORRY FOR HIM
HUK HUK HUK
NO!
THEN HE REALIZED..
THE BASTARD WAS SCREAMING THE SONG--MIMICKING THE OPENING GRUNGE CHORDS
EVEN IN HIS AGONY, THE BOY MOCKED HIM. THE SOUND OF DAVE'S RIBS SHATTERING WAS THE DRUM RIFF FROM THE MIDDLE EIGHT...
..HIS KEENING HOWL THE CHORUS THAT ROSE UNDER THE LAST VERSE
STAMPING HIS FOOT TO THE IMAGINARY RHYTHM, GREEN BROUGHT THE HAMMER DOWN, CRUSHING DAVE'S SKULL, HIS FACE--
--POUNDING UNTIL RAW SHARDS OF BONE JUTTED OUT OF THE EARTH LIKE BROKEN GLASS.
THE SCREAMS HAD LONG SINCE STOPPED, BUT GREEN HAD FINALLY FOUND HIS GROOVE

IT WAS HOT THE NEXT DAY--SO HOT THAT GREEN COULD HEAR BUBBLES OF MOLTEN ASPHALT POPPING UNDER HIS TIRES
HE USED A BLOWTORCH AND BOLT CUTTERS TO FINISH WITH THE BODY. BURNED THE SKIN OFF DAVE'S FINGERS AND TOES, THEN CRUSHED HIS TEETH TO PREVENT ID.
THE RADIO WAS NOTHING BUT "STATIC" SETS THAT WAY IN THE HEAT
WRAPPED THE PIECES IN SOME TRASH BAGS AND SPREAD THE WEALTH BETWEEN A DOZEN LOCAL DUMPSTERS
HE DUMPED THE LAST BAG--WHAT WAS LEFT OF DAVE'S BROKEN SKULL--IN A CAN BESIDE THE "HAPPY DAZE"
HE CROSSED 3 STATE LINES BEFORE HE SAW IT--"THE BEEF AND BRISKET"--BUS BOY WANTED, APPLY INSIDE.
THE MONEY WAS RIGHT AND THE JUKEBOX WAS EVEN BETTER.
NO SLEEP LAST NIGHT, NOW YOU UP AND QUIT..
CHRIST, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK, DAVE'S NEVER STAYED OUT ALL NIGHT BEFORE.
HELL, MAYBE HE GOT LAID.
HE COULDN'T WAIT TO FIND ANOTHER SONG
END

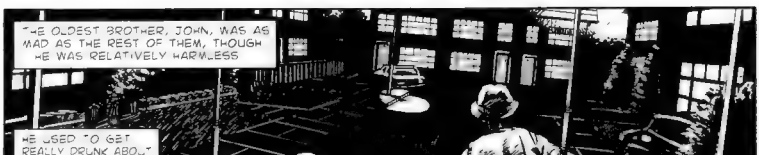
THE MORTONS

writed by: MARTIN CONAGHAN drawed by: MIKE PERKINS lettered by: ROXANNE STARR


THE MORTONS WERE A FAMILY WHO OCCUPIED NUMBER 23 IN THE STREET WHERE I LIVED.
"THE MAD MORTONS" WE CALLED THEM
THEY WERE CRAZY
EVERYBODY HATED THEM

THE MORTON TWINS, MICK AND BRIAN, WERE SICKOS
I REMEMBER ONCE, THEY POSTED A DEAD RAT THROUGH OUR LETTERBOX.
THEY WERE BOTH TWENTY YEARS OLD WHEN THEIR BROTHER, JOE, WAS INVOLVED IN A BREAKOUT FROM PRISON
HE WAS SERVING A 14-YEAR SENTENCE FOR MURDERING HIS FATHER
SOMEONE PUT A HATCHET THROUGH JOE'S HEAD DURING THE BREAKOUT.
THE TWINS WERE LOCKED IN THE LOCAL JAIL FOR A WEEK, WHILE JOE WAS BURIED.
PENDULUM HEIGHTS CEMETARY
THE GRAVEYARD HAD TO BE PATROLED BY THE POLICE FOR TWO MONTHS.
APPARENTLY THEY HAD CONTINUALLY EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN EXAMING JOE'S HEAD.
JOSEPH MORTON 1950-'72

I REMEMBER ANOTHER OCCASION WHEN THEY FOUND A LITTLE DOG EXCITEDLY ROAMING AROUND THE STREETS.
THE POOR THING WAS OBVIOUSLY LOST AND TRYING TO FIND ITS WAY BACK TO ITS OWNERS
BUT BRIAN AND NICK HAD OTHER IDEAS
THEY TEASED THE DOG TO THE TOP OF AN APARTMENT BLOCK.
THEN THREW A BALL OVER THE EDGE OF THE BUILDING FOR THE DOG TO CHASE.
IT WAS ONLY A PUP.

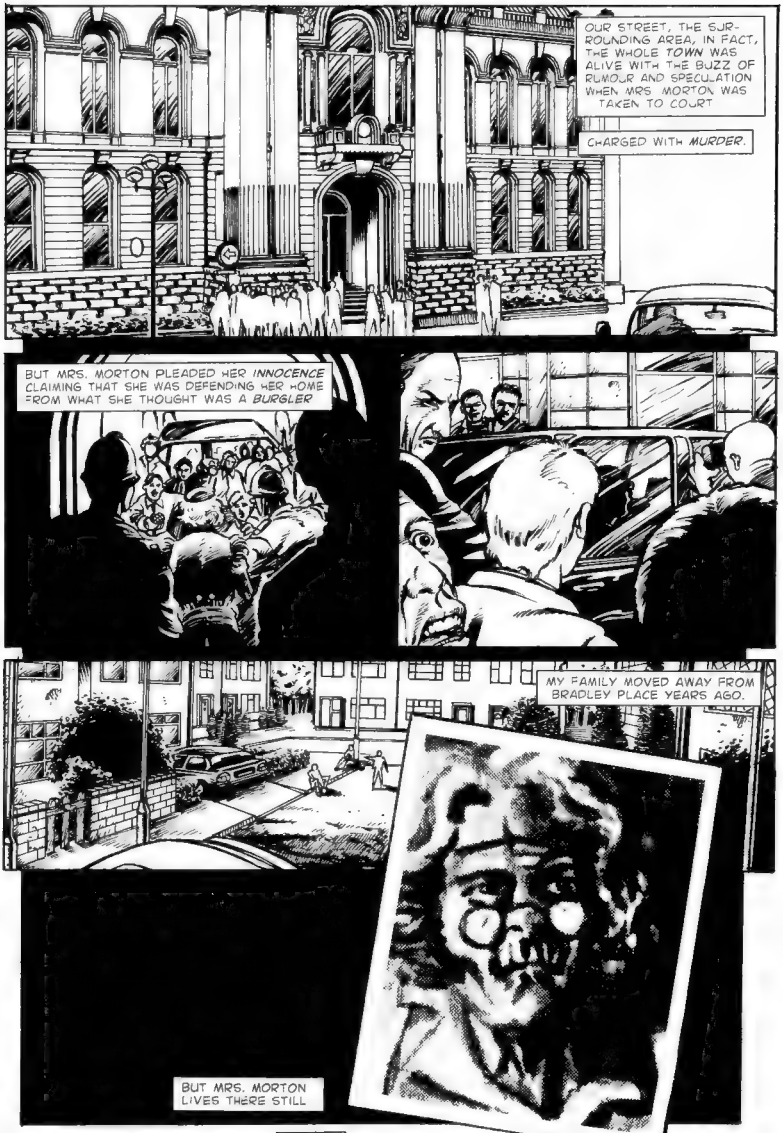

THE OLDEST BROTHER, JOHN, WAS AS MAD AS THE REST OF THEM, THOUGH HE WAS RELATIVELY HARMLESS
HE USED TO GET REALLY DRUNK ABOUT ONCE A WEEK

HE WOULD THEN COME HOME IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND GO AROUND EVERY HOUSE IN THE STREET, SHOUTING, "WAKE UP BRADLEY PLACE!" THROUGH THE LETTERBOXES

I REMEMBER THE FEAR THAT OVERCAME ME AS HE APPROACHED OUR HOUSE.
I WAS ONLY FIVE

SOMEHOW I WOULD ALWAYS PASS WITHOUT INCIDENT

ONE NIGHT HOWEVER, HE WALKED HOME AND PERFORMED HIS WEEKLY RITUA..
WANDER NG AROUND EVERY HOUSE, SHOUT NG HIS CHANT THROUGH EACH LETTERBOX
UNTIL HE REACHED HIS OWN HOUSE
WHEN HE REACHED THE FRONT DOOR, HE LIFTED THE FLAP AND PEEKED IN.
23
HE GOT AS FAR AS "WAKE UP
THEN HIS MOTHER STABBED HIM IN THE FOREHEAD WITH A TOASTING FORK SHE KEPT ABOVE THE FIREPLACE
23
I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT NIGHT-- THE NIGHT THAT JOHN MORTON DIED

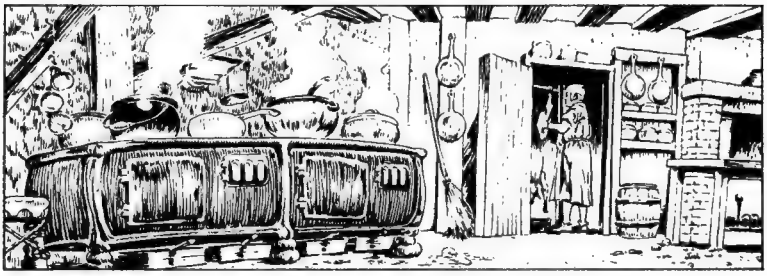

OUR STREET, THE SURROUNDING AREA, IN FACT, THE WHOLE *TOWN* WAS ALIVE WITH THE BUZZ OF RUMOUR AND SPECULATION WHEN MRS. MORTON WAS TAKEN TO COURT
CHARGED WITH *MURDER*.
BUT MRS. MORTON PLEADED HER *INNOCENCE* CLAIMING THAT SHE WAS DEFENDING HER HOME FROM WHAT SHE THOUGHT WAS A *BURGLER*
MY FAMILY MOVED AWAY FROM BRADLEY PLACE YEARS AGO.
BUT MRS. MORTON LIVES THERE STILL
THE END

Ray Lago

Sketchbook

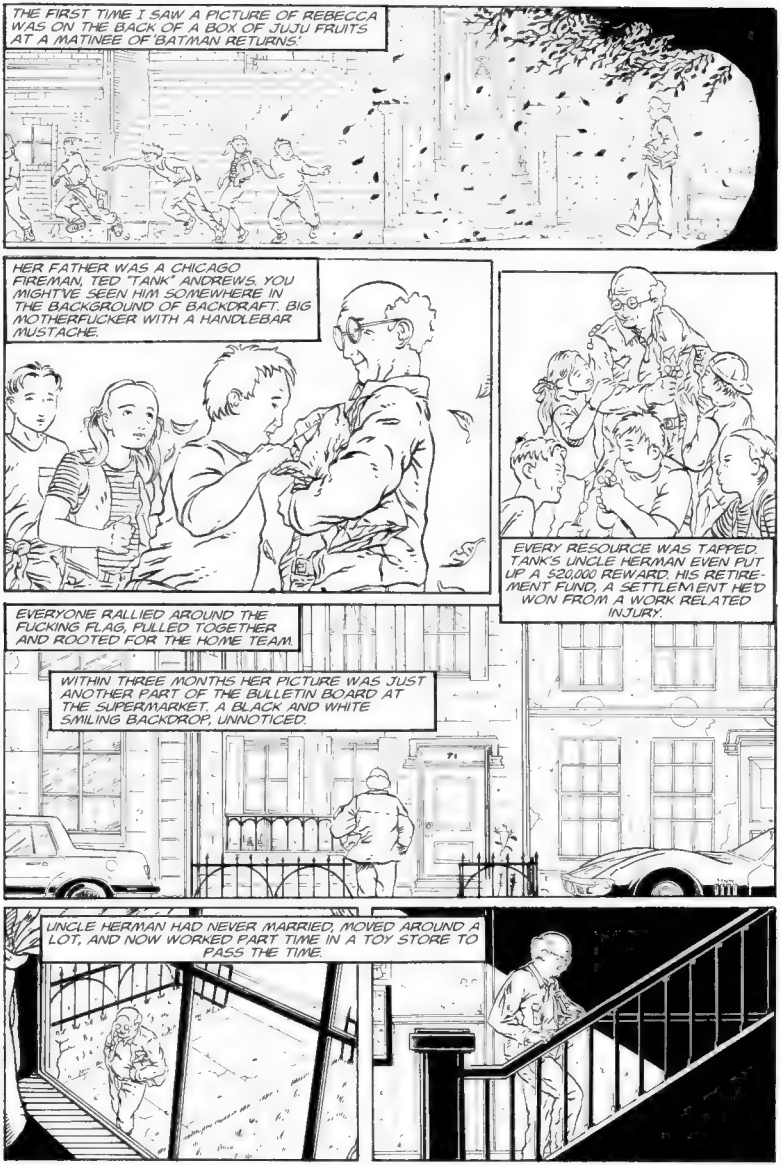
·RL·

FAGO



REBECCA ANDREWS DISAPPEARED IN THE SUMMER OF 1992.
GOLDEN HAIRED AND ONLY SIX YEARS OLD, SHE WAS LAST SEEN STANDING IN HER FRONT YARD WEARING A RED JUMPER, EATING AN ICE CREAM CONE.
HER MOTHER WAS IN THE KITCHEN MAKING DINNER. POT ROAST AND SWEET POTATOES. THEY HAD A FENCED IN YARD. LIVED IN A GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD.
ALL OF YOUR FAVORITE FLAVORS!
BUBBLE GUM
ESHEW'S BREATH!
PIXES FLATS!
OW POP
FLAVORS!
EVERYTHING SHOULD HAVE BEEN OKAY.
BUT LIFE DON'T WORK THAT WAY.

JUJU EYES


THE FIRST TIME I SAW A PICTURE OF REBECCA WAS ON THE BACK OF A BOX OF JUJU FRUITS AT A MATINEE OF 'BATMAN RETURNS.'
HER FATHER WAS A CHICAGO FIREMAN, TED "TANK" ANDREWS. YOU MIGHTVE SEEN HIM SOMEWHERE IN THE BACKGROUND OF BACKDRAFT. BIG MOTHERFUCKER WITH A HANDLEBAR MUSTACHE.
EVERY RESOURCE WAS TAPPED. TANK'S UNCLE HERMAN EVEN PUT UP A $20,000 REWARD. HIS RETIREMENT FUND, A SETTLEMENT HE'D WON FROM A WORK RELATED INJURY.
EVERYONE RALLIED AROUND THE FUCKING FLAG, PULLED TOGETHER AND ROOTED FOR THE HOME TEAM.
WITHIN THREE MONTHS HER PICTURE WAS JUST ANOTHER PART OF THE BULLETIN BOARD AT THE SUPERMARKET. A BLACK AND WHITE SMILING BACKDROP, UNNOTICED.
UNCLE HERMAN HAD NEVER MARRIED, MOVED AROUND A LOT, AND NOW WORKED PART TIME IN A TOY STORE TO PASS THE TIME.

LAST WEEK, TWO YEARS AFTER SHE VANISHED, A MAILING LIST FOR KIDDIE PORN BUYERS FELL INTO OUR HANDS.
IT HAD HERMAN'S NAME ON IT WITH HIS ROCKFORD ADDRESS.
SHUT THE DOOR, HERMAN.
I D-DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY, T-T-TAKE.
I'M NOT A THIEF
LOOKING AT HIM I KNEW.
I'M HERE FOR THE REWARD.
FOR REBECCA.
...OH MY GOD...

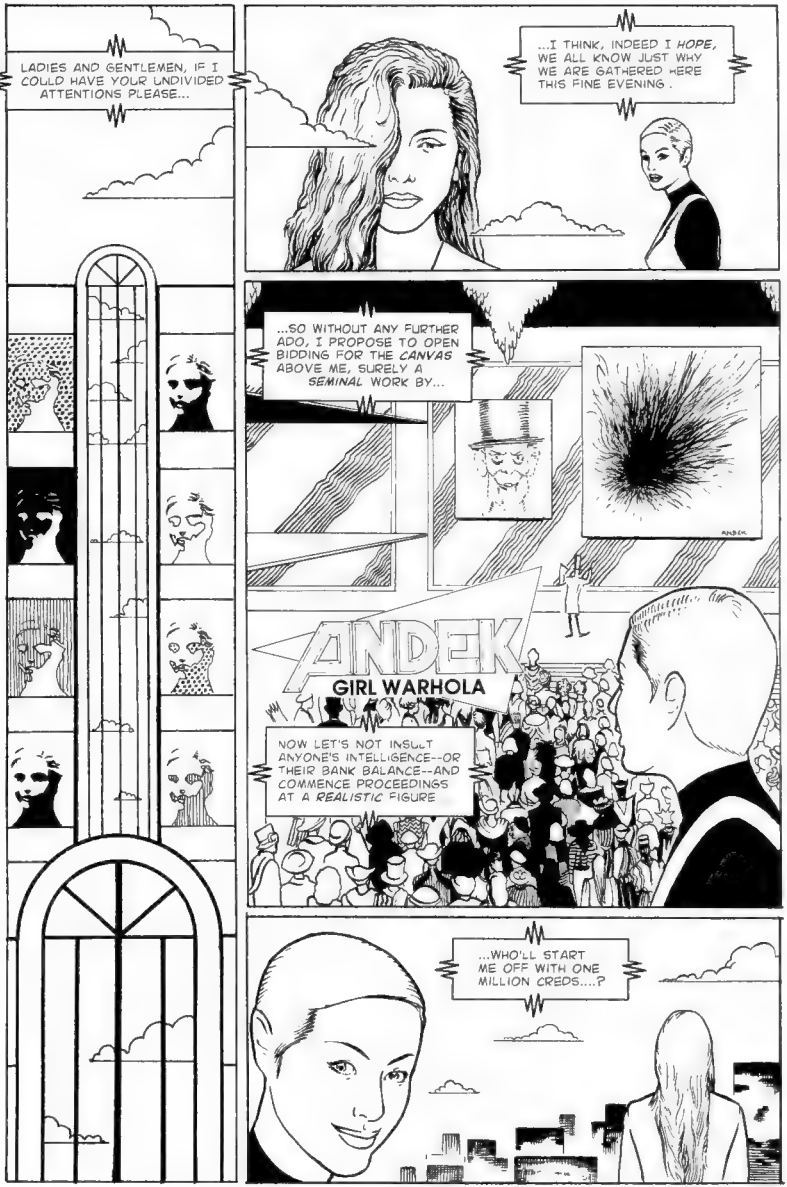
WHERE...WHERE DID YOU...WHERE WAS SHE?
THAT'S A NICE COLLECTION OF POLAROIDS YOU'VE GOT THERE HERMAN.
THE ONES IN THE BROWN PAPER BAG WITH THE RED RUBBER BAND.
UNDERNEATH ALL THOSE MAGAZINES IN THE BEDROOM...WITH THE PAGES STUCK TOGETHER.
HIS SWEAT STUNK.
HERE, HERMAN.
RELAX. HAVE A DRINK, I UNDERSTAND.
BILL WANTED THIS GUY SO FUCKING BAD.

WHACK!
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
BUT I HAD A SON.
I WANT THE REWARD. $20,000 DOLLARS.
WH-WHERE..
WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME

IT'S OKAY, I KNOW ABOUT A MAN'S SPECIAL NEEDS.
SHE WAS A PRECIOUS GIRL...
...SO BEAUTIFUL...
WHERE'D YOU PUT'ER, HERMAN?
THE OLD ROCK QUARRY...
...BY THE TRAIN STATION IN PENTECOSTAL.

krunkted!
GGGGGGU!
AND THE MONEY, HERMAN? WHERE'S THE MONEY?
WHERE IS IT?!
OH GOD, OH GOD! THERE ISN'T ANY!
IT'S ALL GONE!
WHAT ELSE DO YOU WANT? JESUS, WHAT...

I'M GETTING IT.
GUCK!
MY SON BOBBY WAS NINE YEARS OLD.


LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IF I COULD HAVE YOUR UNDIVIDED ATTENTIONS PLEASE...
...I THINK, INDEED I HOPE, WE ALL KNOW JUST WHY WE ARE GATHERED HERE THIS FINE EVENING.
...SO WITHOUT ANY FURTHER ADO, I PROPOSE TO OPEN BIDDING FOR THE CANVAS ABOVE ME, SURELY A SEMINAL WORK BY...
ANDEK
GIRL WARHOLA
NOW LET'S NOT INSULT ANYONE'S INTELLIGENCE--OR THEIR BANK BALANCE--AND COMMENCE PROCEEDINGS AT A REALISTIC FIGURE
...WHO'LL START ME OFF WITH ONE MILLION CREDS....?

EARLIER..
BUT...
BUT NOTHING, BABE YOU'RE GOING TO BE JUST FINE.
..SIMPLY SLAP THE PORTABLE DISRUPTOR ON ITS CHEST AND BINGO...!
...YOU'LL BE BACK IN TIME FOR ELEVENSES
WHERE'S THE RISK IN THAT? IT'LL BE EASY.
AND BEFORE YOU ASK, I'VE TRACED ALL THE TIME-LINES AND THEY'RE OKAY.
HAPPY NOW?
...YOU'D DO IT IF YOU LOVED ME...
GOOD, THAT'S DECIDED THEN.

SET FOR TAKEOFFPPP
..GOT A BAAAD FEELING 'BOUT THIS.
KCHINK!
VVVRRROOOOMMM
(PHEW) GLAD THAT'S OVER WIT-... TIME TRAVELLING STILL TURNS MY STOMAC-
BACK EVERYONE, SHE'S DISRUPTING!!!
SEE, WHAT DID I TELL YOU?

EASY AS PIE.
OHSHITOHSHITOHSHITOHSHITOHSHIT
SHOULD NEVER HAVE...
NOT AFTER LAST TIME..
WHAT WAS **SKRT**
--BABE **SKREEEE**NG ON?
MISS BERLOITZ, THIS **SKUEGRR** FUNNY!!!

BABE, WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE PLAYING AT?!? TALK TO ME!!!
MY ** SKRAAAA**D ANDE**SKREEE**
THIS'LL TEACH ME TO MIX BUSINESS WITH P_EASURE
DAMN THAT GIRL!
TIK TIK TIK
COMMENCE RECONSTRUCTION!
BUT..
NO, BUT JUST DO IT!
DIS**KR**RR***PPT
(PUFF)...ANDEK ...(PANT)..WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON? WHAT'S...
ANDEK?

YOU
BITCH
ANDEK
PREPARE CANVAS NUMBER SIX FOR OUR INCOMING GUESTS...

THANK YOU

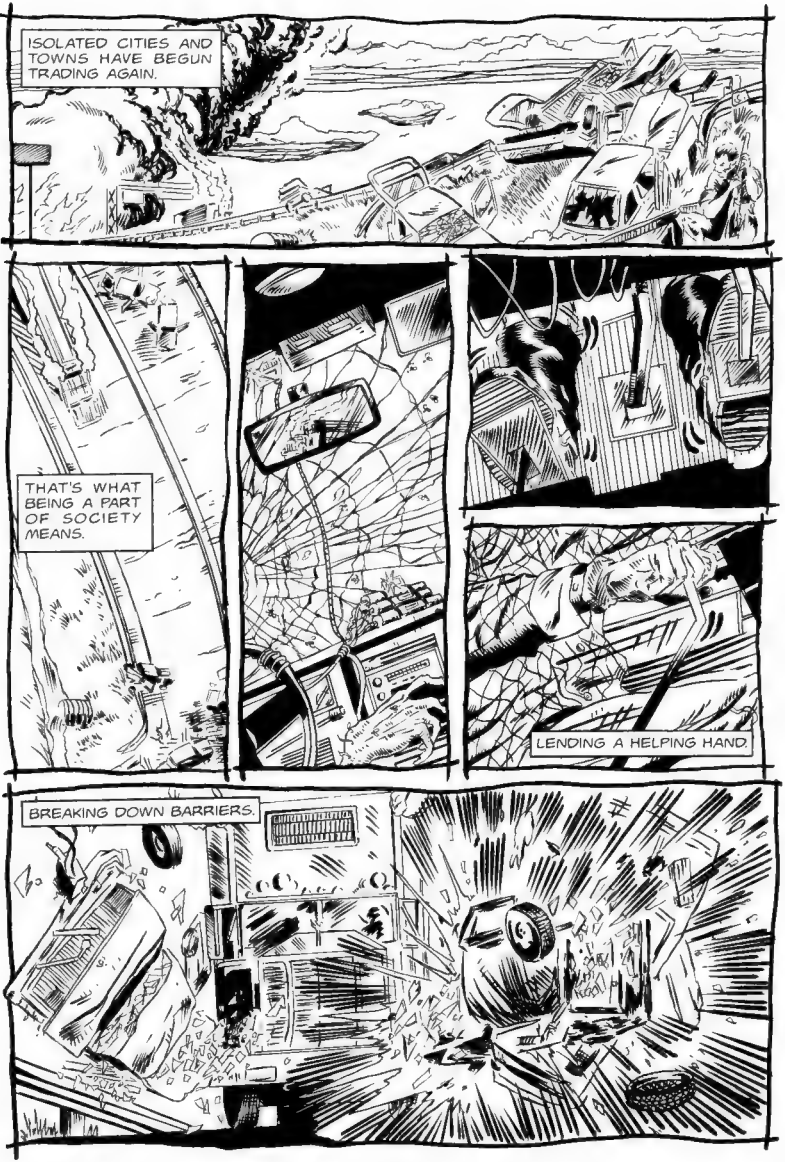
TO A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP
KCHINK!
NOT TO MENTION 18 MILLION CREDS
MY DEAREST, DARLING BABE, TO EVEN CONSIDER I WOULD HAVE LEFT YOU STRANDED
...WHY I'M OFFENDED.
FIN.

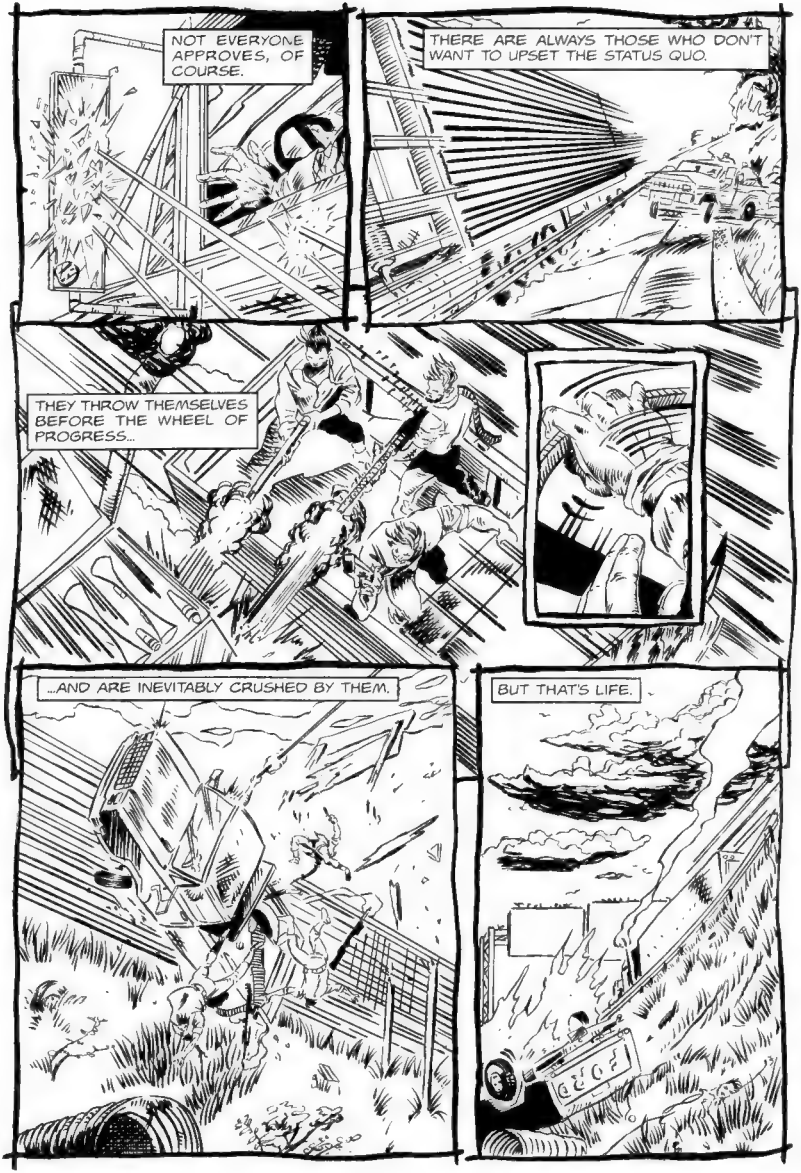
PEDESTRIAN

Poetry Slam by PAUL ERICKSON Adapted for Comics by PAUL FRICKE

ERT!
HEY, BONE-HEAD!
LOOK AT ME WHEN YOU WALK IN FRONT OF MY CAR!
YOU HAVE THE RIGHT OF WAY, BUT YOU AREN'T COLLISION-PROOF! IF I RUN YOU DOWN, NO BODY SHOP WILL FIX YOUR BODY!
WHY DO YOU TRUST ME? ARE YOU CONFIDENT THAT:
I SEE YOU?
MY BRAKES ARE WORKING?
THE PAVEMENT ISN'T SLICK?
I'M NOT DRUNK?
I'M NOT LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO RUN DOWN?
DON'T YOU DARE PUT YOUR LIFE IN MY STRANGER'S HANDS!
MAYBE YOU WANT TO BE RUN DOWN TO SUE MY INSURANCE COMPANY, SWAPPING YOUR MAIMED BODY FOR THE GOOD LIFE!
ARE YOU WORTH SO LITTLE?
MAYBE IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER IF YOU DON'T GET TO WORK OR YOU DON'T GET HOME TO YOUR KIDS OR MAYBE YOU WEREN'T GOING ANYWHERE IN THE FIRST PLACE!
DEAD OR ALIVE, BROKEN OR WHOLE, YOU DON'T CARE ANYMORE! AM I SUPPOSED TO CARE?
I CALL YOU BONE-HEAD AS MY BENEDICTION.
STOP

109 199
IT'S AMAZING THE WORLD COMES TO AN END.
109 199
THE DEAD RISE UP AND DESTROY THE EARTH.
GARY
AND I'VE STILL GOT THE SAME JOB
THE FLAMES OF CIVILIZATION REFUSE TO DIE OUT.


ISOLATED CITIES AND TOWNS HAVE BEGUN TRADING AGAIN.
THAT'S WHAT BEING A PART OF SOCIETY MEANS.
LENDING A HELPING HAND.
BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS.

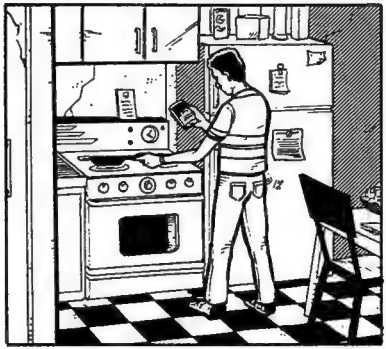

NOT EVERYONE APPROVES, OF COURSE.
THERE ARE ALWAYS THOSE WHO DON'T WANT TO UPSET THE STATUS QUO.
THEY THROW THEMSELVES BEFORE THE WHEEL OF PROGRESS...
...AND ARE INEVITABLY CRUSHED BY THEM.
BUT THAT'S LIFE.

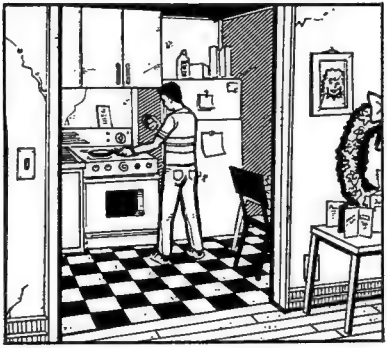
AND DEATH.
YEP. IF THERE'S ONE THING THAT'S FOR CERTAIN...
...IT'S THAT ADVERSITY MAKES FOLKS RISE ABOVE THEIR DIFFERENCES.
...TO HELP EACH OTHER OUT
...AND DO WHATEVER IS NECESSARY.

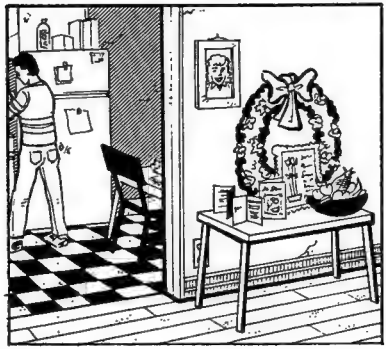
AFTER ALL, ISN'T THAT WHAT BEING CIVILIZED IS ALL ABOUT?
RIDES OVER, FOLKS
DINNER'S ON ME.

LIONEL'S LAMENT

by JSH 8.84 and DEAN HASPIEL







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ISSUES

Hal Phillips
623 W. Walnut St.
Long Beach, NY 11561

Joe,

I'm up to #21 today.

Liked the cover; nothing special.

"Trollords" was cute, but not very good, confirming my expectations.

"Mr. Mamoulian" was one of the good ones. Really good.

"Houdini" was cute, but in a good way. Absolutely loved the art.

If the "John Bergin Sketchbook" could speak, it would say "Sketchbooks are a good thing."

"You Can Never Go Back" was great. Initially, I didn't like the unfocused style of it, but as I think about it more, that's exactly why I DID like it. It didn't bother with an extraneous plot, it just presented the original idea. Good.

Sorry my letters to you are always so stupid.

"The Visible Man" was the highlight of the issue, because Paul Pope, as I constantly tell anybody who will listen, is Jesus. Every time he's in NEGATIVE BURN, an angel gets his wings.

Unusually enough, I like Greg DiGenti's strip. I make it a point to bash Greg DiGenti as often as possible. Bully for him.

"Red Jack" was stupid. Never should have been born (pun not intended).

"Classics Desecrated" was also one of the better ones. One of my top five "Classics Desecrated," at least.

Good issue. Make more.

Glad you like issue.
Letters not stupid.
Joe like.
Send more.
Hurry up and catch up to present issue.

Olav Beemer
Brugakker 36-06
3704 LP Zeist
The Netherlands

Dear Joe,

My! NEGATIVE BURN #24 hit the stands merely two weeks after last issue had done so. This way it's a very safe bet to say that this is a month I won't fall short on my prescribed dose of BURN stories, so my doctor thanks you, Joe.

Surprisingly, I found the first feature of this issue—the "Kilroy Is Here" installment—to be extremely disappointing. the reason why I've come to this conclusion is that there was no point in the short story. There was no plot. It just contained a short recounting of a series of events in the troubled life of the boy called Tommy, while Kilroy did nothing at all. What's a story without a dilemma for the main character? What's a story that's so linear that it's almost as if looking through a photograph album? In my opinion, not much. I'm sorry to say, but this was the first "Kilroy" tale that let me down.

"Strangehaven" was a very interesting read, despite the fact that the accent most characters in the tale speak was at times hard to follow. The story was highly entertaining, including a surprise ending, and the artwork really meshed well with the tale. In fact, it has made me curious as to where this book will be self-published later this summer? Perhaps you could fill me in?

It was a joyous experience seeing Paul Pope's work appear in these very pages, but frankly speaking, I had not a clue what was going on in his "Gangster Strip Dragway." Oh well, one doesn't always have to understand something in order to enjoy something, right?

"Shadow" undoubtedly was this issue's highlight feature. Although I had never heard of either Martin Conaghan or Mike Perkins before reading this issue, their work truly captured my undivided interest. Their production read like a modern time, spooky fairy tale, and especially the concept that one can escape one's shadow, immortality is yours is very intriguing. Of course, the fact that Tommy Trowers did succeed eventually was all the more surprising, making this feature an instant classic. It has my vote for the best single feature in this book for the year 1995.

And finally, "A Killer Story" turned out to be a textbook example of Murphy's Law combined with the Chaos Theory. It was entertaining to see things go so wrong in so short a time span, and how everybody ended up killing each other and themselves in the end. The moral of the story? I pick "D": if mankind goes on like this (paranoia, angst, distrust and hatred), mankind will end up destroying itself. Fine job.

Next up, issue #25! I can hardly wait, so get it our way already!

You can look at this month's ad for Gary Spencer Millidge's STRANGEHAVEN elsewhere in this issue to see about ordering information.

I'm glad you enjoyed Martin and Mike's "Shadow" so much, Olav. Look for more work from both these fine creators in these pages in the months ahead. In fact, in this month's very issue! Martin will be bringing us a six-part serial titled "The Brutalizers" (with inks by Mike), while Mike can also be found doing the art over in KILROY IS HERE #4 and then again starting with #6, where he'll be illustrating the "Pride, Prejudice and Persecution" story-arc.

Jason Whitely
via Internet

Joe,

I wrote a long LOC and it got returned to me as an invalid addressee. Then I forgot to save it! I really don't feel like writing the whole thing again, so I'll just say a couple of things, paraphrasing the main thrust of the letter.

It's great to have a place to showcase work that would otherwise not get seen. Work like this is more personal and much more meaningful. I liked the longer stories more. Both the art and stories were a mixed bunch of stuff I liked, somewhat liked, and disliked. There wasn't enough to your "Kilroy" story to say whether or not I liked it. I don't know the character well enough or the storyline. I have always enjoyed NB when I've picked it up.

Sorry you lost the long letter, Jason, but I'm just happy to hear from you regardless of the length of the comments. I've had mixed emotions on my Kilroy story—some haven't liked it and some have simply loved it. It just goes to show that it's all a matter of personal opinion. Like most of the shorts in NB, I never know what some people will like and what others won't.

Edward Douglas
via CompuServe

Hey, Joe! Ooops. I had no idea I was so behind on my reading...so instead of reviewing NB #25...I'll be reviewing NEGATIVE BURN #23 and 24.

First off...NB #23! (Actually, one of the best issues so far, IMO)

"Inosion"- a great opening story by Russ Cooper and the all-time coolest inker Wade von Grawbadger! I really enjoyed this story and I can see how they could turn it into a long-term prospect even though it works so well as a stand-alone. I liked the Nexus-looking hero that intervenes in his daydreams and the related covers by Stuart Immonen and Chris Sprouse were terrific! Great start for the issue!

"Mr. Mamoulian" I can take or leave, so I'll leave this one.

Unfortunately, I'm not much of a poetry buff so "Armadillo"/"The Island" were lost on me, even though it shows some of Paul Pope's landscape abilities.

"Last of the Hero Society" - Amazing story by everyone's favorite Golden Age story-teller Len Strazewski! The art reminded me of Rick Veitch's work, especially in BRAT PACK, and the story has many relations to that and some of the other "alternate" superhero comics like WATCHMEN. I'd be interested to see more along this lines, and this is the kind of story that must have been the appeal for Len's JSA and Impact! work (none of which I've read).

"Classics Desecrated" - like "Mr. Mamoulian" but this had one of the funnier punchlines.

"The Creep: Exorcism 101" - I'd just like to say that "Philip Hester is a genius!" While I always love his surrealistic artwork, the stories he writes are always different from everything else out there right now. I loved "Boneshaker" and I love this wild new character of his! Very funny stuff, indeed. More! More!

"Friendless" - I've never heard of Greg DiGenti, but this was a funny strip with a hilarious punchline in the tone of Daniel Clowes. I think that this is a guy to watch...

"The Fiend: Grunge Gouging" - I didn't like this one as much as "The Creep." It seemed like a cross between "Milk and Cheese" and "The Mask" and didn't have the originality of either. Seemed like Brian Clopper venting some steam and nothing more....as did...

"Smoke Story" - Taking a personal viewpoint a bit too far, I think. While this was a good autobiographical piece, it seemed a bit too preachy for me.

Overall, I thought that this was a great issue with a lot of variety! (I never realized how hard it was to review an anthology book...)

Next...NEGATIVE BURN #24:

Well, the beautiful Mike Kaluta cover was a nice start, but I didn't like this issue as much as the last one. The highlight being:

"Kilroy Is Here: In Remembrance"- Ooo. The pressure is on. <G> I've liked most of the historically-oriented stories of Kilroy that have appeared in past issues, so I read this, thinking I knew exactly what to expect. This was an extremely heart-warming story about a victim of AIDS and you prove once again that the stories aren't about Kilroy, but about the people he meets. The art was a bit hard to digest, but the story is easily one of your best. (Another story for the next collection, I guess.) I still think that I like this format better than the longer continued stories, though.

"Mr. Mamoulian" - nope. Still don't get it. Sorry.

"Strangehaven" - Well, I've already read the first issue of Gary Millidge's comic, and I can't remember if I liked it or not. This story is a bit of a strange self-contained lead-in (?) to that book. I'm not sure. This definitely has a bit of both EASTENDERS and TWIN PEAKS, both of which I've enjoyed from time to time. This was okay.

"Gangster Strip Raceway" - Another Paul Pope piece? (Boy, he's slowly becoming "anthology-guy"...when's he going to finish THB?) I prefer his writing and dialogue more than his art, so I had to really study this one to understand it, and after doing so, I enjoyed it...especially the ending. This was pretty cute.

"Shadow" and "Corps Creadh" - Honest efforts to tell interesting horror stories which were both lost on me. Oh, well. Maybe next time, guys!

"A Killer Story" - I feel really guilty about this, but this one made me laugh hysterically! Bill Jankowski's a funny guy taking the old "ghost story" about "The Hook" and giving it a unique (and truly violent) spin.

"Walking the Pizza" seemed like something that belonged in INSTANT PIANO...a two-page strip about an everyday event, and "Classics Desecrated" brought back my original apathy to the series.

"Killer Story" and the "Kilroy" story (hmmmm....) are the highlights for this issue, but I'd recommend the last issue before this one.

I guess eventually, you'll put out a second best-of collection and I imagine it will be even better than the first. Not that I read the first, but there have been a lot of great comics in the last few issues, and that's without even having read #25. The line-up looks impressive and I can't wait to get to it! I imagine it will be better and more succinct than DARK HORSE PRESENTS #100, anyway!

I hope you liked NB #25 as much as you were anticipating, Edward. I'll second your notion that Phillip Hester is a genius! Why do you think I try to get him into these pages as often as possible. Since you seem to like Phillip's work and my own Kilroy character then I might suggest that you check out issue #6 of KILROY IS HERE (Jan. release) where Phillip takes a crack at writing and drawing a 6-page back-up story featuring Kilroy. I think you'll like it. I know I did.

Yes, BEST OF NEGATIVE BURN: YEAR TWO will be out in Feb. Stories that are eligible are from issues #13-24 of the series. Anybody got any suggestions they'd like to make out there?

Well, that's it for this month. Keep those letters rolling in. As always you can reach me at PO Box 893, Acworth, GA 30101. Thanks.

—Joe

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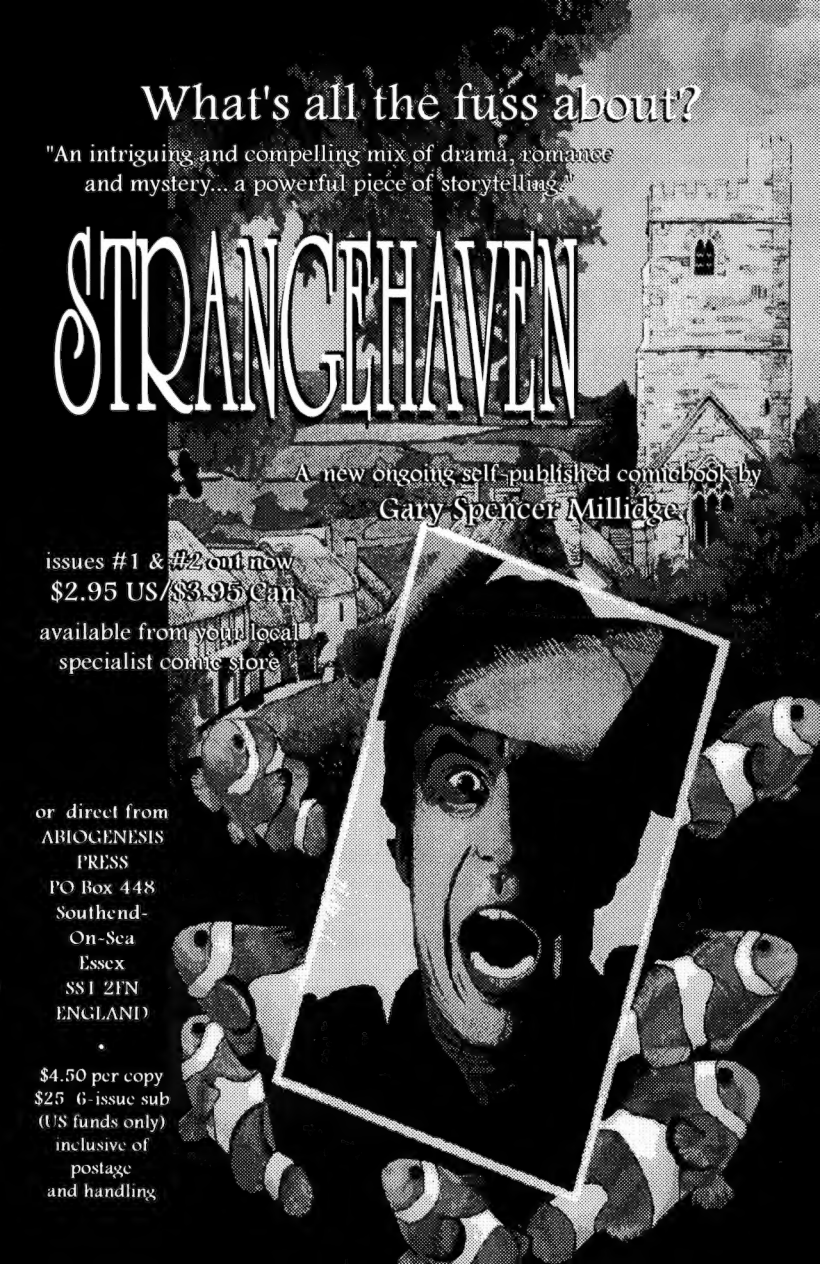

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